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NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW.

No. DXIX.

FEBRUARY, 1900.

THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH AFRICA.

BY LIEUTENANT-GENERAL JOHN F. OWEN, R. A.

So completely was the military situation in South Africa controlled, prior to the outbreak of hostilities, by political considerations, and so seriously have they affected our strategy since then, that it is absolutely necessary to refer to them in the first place.

Broadly speaking, from a British point of view, the state of things which existed in the summer of 1899 in the South African Republic was as follows:

A great number of the subjects of our Empire, both from Great Britain and her self-governing colonies, had been attracted to the Transvaal by the starting of a great gold-mining industry there and by the commercial enterprises following in its train. They had so increased that they practically outnumbered the Boer inhabitants. By the investment of their capital, by their enterprise, skill and labor, all of which were heavily taxed, the revenue of the Republic had been prodigiously augmented. They constituted a busy, useful and, on the whole, a highly civilized community and had created a great commercial city, Johannesburg.

But, although they contributed the greatest portion of the State revenue, they were allowed no voice in its expenditure. They were practically deprived of voting rights (though the conventions of 1881 and 1884 guaranteed all civil rights), nor even

allowed to constitute a municipality for carrying out necessary work in the city they had created. They were prevented from educating their children in their own tongue in State-aided schools and were continually treated with much contumely. Scant justice was obtained by them, the Boer judges, magistrates and juries being usually prejudiced against them, and very flagrant cases of injustice often occurred. The "Uitlanders," as they were termed, were treated, in many ways, as mere helots.

The Boer officials and the Pretorian Government itself had notoriously become more and more corrupt, and, while immense sums out of the revenue were spent for other purposes, the streets of Johannesburg were allowed to become a danger and a disgrace to any civilized State, an indication of what was meted out of the revenue to the despised Uitlanders.

Her subjects had constantly appealed to the Government of Great Britain for redress of their wrongs, and our ministers had addressed frequent expostulations to the Government of Pretoria and carried out negotiations for making their position more tolerable. But, hampered as we were by the effects of the ill-starred Jameson Raid, in 1894, these had not for several years been pressed home with much force. In 1899, however, the raid seemed sufficiently expiated, and the murder in that year of a harmless British subject by a Boer policeman (who got off scot-free), and further petitions made in consequence, brought matters to a head. Our High Commissioner and the Home Government became convinced of the immediate necessity for entering into serious negotiations and for insisting upon justice and redress. No great Empire could longer brook, with any self-respect, such continuous ill treatment of a large number of her subjects by a small and but partially civilized Republic. It was evident that the only permanent remedy was to endow the Uitlanders with sufficient voting power to protect themselves and their interests constitutionally, by representation in the Volksraad, in some such manner as in the Cape Colony, Natal, and the Orange Free State, where Afrikaner (Dutch and English) and Uitlander alike had equal rights. At the same time it was quite recognized that the voting power should be so arranged, in the first place, as not to overpower the Burgher vote. On these bases negotiations were commenced.

The people of Great Britain and her Colonies had, by this

time, as the truth came out, become more thoroughly aroused to their countrymen's wrongs and were determined that these should be redressed, but they were neither anxious for war nor did they expect it, believing that, if sufficient political pressure were exercised, the Pretorian Government would yield. Nor was it generally supposed that the Orange Free State, although sympathizing with the Transvaal Boers, being closely allied to them by blood, was otherwise than friendly to us.

Public opinion, usually not well informed, remained doubtful on many points, until President Krüger showed his real hand toward the end of the negotiations. There was, and is still, much sympathy in England with those Boers who deem they are fighting for their country alone. And at first the British public took somewhat negligently the despicable tyranny of the Pretorian Oligarchy, so far away, and its ambitious hopes of destroying the British domination in South Africa—both of which are now sufficiently patent—viewing them with a good-natured but mistaken contempt.

Had the British Government sent out sufficient forces to South Africa to secure our own territory against attack, or if it had in the early part of these negotiations made the military preparations necessary, they would have been accused, it is alleged, of putting an unfair and unjustifiable pressure on the Boer Government, and their difficulties in arriving at a satisfactory solution, which they hoped to secure by diplomatic pressure, would have been much increased.

Political considerations thus prevented the necessary military preparations, on a large scale, being made against the possible contingency of our being forced into war; and, when that contingency suddenly arose, the military situation was, in consequence, most seriously jeopardized. Whether the political reasons mentioned were sufficiently valid reasons for such neglect, whether there were other more urgent ones, or whether, in reality, mistaken motives of economy had to do with it, are not matters for discussion here. We have merely to observe how they affected the military situation in fact.

The British Government had been fully aware that, for many years past, a great portion of the large revenue, mainly drawn from the pockets of the Uitlanders, had been spent by the Transvaal Government in building forts, in providing arms and mili-

tary equipment, in payment of mercenaries, and, generally, in preparing for war—nominally, for the purpose of defense against such a raid as Jameson's or against an Uitlander rising, but in reality on a very much greater scale than could possibly be necessary for such a purpose.

The actual number of available Burghers and of their mercenaries was known, and the nature and amount of the armament. It was also known that a great reserve of rifles and ammunition had been bought—beyond those required for the whole of the Transvaal and Free State Burghers—for the purpose of arming Afrikaner sympathizers in our own Colonies, and that immense sums (as much as £3,000,000 in a single year) had been spent in pushing forward a Boer propaganda in those Colonies and elsewhere. Our Government was further well acquainted with the treaty between the two Republics. Yet, knowing all this, if they had plainly stated, to begin with, that the Pretorian Government was preparing, at a convenient season, with the aid of the Orange Free State (which had always been regarded as most friendly to us), and with the assistance of rebel sympathizers in our Colonies, to overturn British supremacy in South Africa, and to replace it by a Boer dominion, they would have been laughed at as alarmists raising a cry to cover political ends.

From time to time, within the last few years, the handful of our troops in Cape Colony and Natal had been sparingly increased, but only in a sort of tentative way. The Afrikaner Bund party was in power in Cape Colony, and was inimical even to the small increase. It was not desired to offend their susceptibilities; and for political reasons, therefore, the imperial forces in South Africa were so few in number as to be totally insufficient to protect our Colonies from attack of anything but a small force. In Cape Colony there were 4,000, in Natal 8,000, not to mention small bodies of armed police spread over the great areas of Rhodesia and Bechuanaland, or a total of about 12,000, with some 5,000 Colonial troops, to be relied upon as immediately available.

The political conditions in Natal were different from those in Cape Colony. There was no Bund Ministry there, and the inhabitants were for the most part thoroughly loyal. Fearing a sudden raid, her Ministers urgently requested that our forces there should be so increased as to safeguard Natal from an attack, unless made in great force. In consequence, a body of 8,000 British troops

was in August ordered from India, under Brigadier-General Symons. This force brought up the number of troops in Natal to about 16,000 regular and some 4,000 of the local colonial forces. A few battalions of infantry from our coaling stations were also ordered to Natal, and General Sir G. White was sent out to assume command, arriving there early in October.

President Krüger first made fair promises and proposals and then drew back with the usual Boer shiftiness, taking away with one hand what he apparently gave with the other; until, at last, it became so evident that he had no real intention of granting substantial voting power to the Uitlanders, nor of redressing their manifest wrongs, that the negotiations were broken off. The President was informed that the English Government would formulate its own proposals. Tardy preparations were made by our Government for the arbitrament of arms, if it should come to that; and, shortly afterward, the world was astonished by the rude and imperious ultimatum issued from Pretoria.

President Krüger's ultimatum of the 9th of October (its term to expire on the 11th) was received in London on the 10th, and on the latter date President Steyn threw the Free State into the balance against us. But it was only on the 7th of October that our Army Reserves were called out, to the number of 25,000, and that the definite organization for the field of an army corps of 52,000* men was set in action. On the 18th further steps were taken as to the embodiment of militia and calling out of Militia Reserves, but the embarkation of the army corps did not commence until the 20th. As the voyage of the transports would occupy approximately twenty days, and as it was proposed that the troops should embark at the rate of 9,000 a day, the whole of the army corps could not arrive at Cape Town until the middle of November, thus giving the Boers, who were mobilized and at or over the border on the 11th of October, a long start, of at least five weeks, before our reinforcements were even landed. As a matter of fact, the whole of our army corps was not landed until December.

The military situation when hostilities actually began, on the 11th of October, was as follows:

*The dates and numbers of troops given must be taken generally as only approximate, though sufficiently so for practical purposes. Nor does the number of troops mentioned in any case, necessarily denote the number available for the fighting line; a very large proportion must usually be deducted for men employed on lines of communication in supply, transport, medical aid, etc., for meeting the thousand needs of large bodies of troops in the field. A percentage also must be deducted for men temporarily sick.

To the east in Natal we held Ladysmith, with a force of about 9,000 men, having a detached post of 3,000 at Glencoe Junction, 42 miles to the right front, covering Dundee. At Pietermaritzburg and at the base at Durban were small bodies of troops, while a few posts, feebly garrisoned, existed on the line of railway communication.

The "Bund Ministry," in power in Cape Colony, showed themselves very lukewarm in making provisions for defense, and they did not call out for service any of the volunteer force until the 26th of October, and then only a small portion. Nor were the Cape Mounted Rifles, their permanently organized military force, permitted to take any active share in the defense of the Colony until long afterward. The regular forces available were sent up to the most important strategic points covering the three main railway lines and the branches connecting them.

Into Kimberley (647 miles from Cape Town and 486 from Port Elizabeth) were thrown about 400 regulars. Various local corps and small bodies of Protectorate Police and others brought up the total garrison to some 2,000. This place offered great facilities for defense, the great mounds of rubbish from the mine workings giving good positions for guns and earthworks. Mr. Rhodes had thrown in his lot with the town he is so thoroughly identified with, and his presence made the Boers doubly anxious to take it.

Mafeking, over 220 miles north of Kimberley (870 miles from Cape Town by rail), was garrisoned by Protectorate and other armed police, and by colonial corps to the number of about 600, under Colonel Baden-Powell, assisted by a few other British officers.

Far away in Rhodesia, a small force of mounted police at Fort Tuli protected the borders on the north of the Transvaal.

Altogether, with the exception of Sir G. White's small army, our forces in South Africa consisted of mere handfuls of men scattered over a vast area, in posts and unfortified towns hastily prepared for defense.

The first military operations of much importance after hostilities began took place in Natal, and were intimately connected with Ladysmith, which is a small town, with a railway station, lying on the northern bank of the Klip River, 189 miles from our sea base at Durban. It lies on high ground (3,200 feet), and the

situation is a very healthy one. For many years past our troops in Natal had carried out their training and exercises on a large area of land in its immediate neighborhood, which was very suitable for the purpose. Musketry and artillery ranges had been established, barracks built and considerable depots of military stores collected there. Strategically, the position is an excellent one, covering, as it does, the junction of the two railway lines leading into Natal, from the Free State and from Pretoria, respectively. But, unless held by a very large force, it was not tactically a good position for defense, there being many high, isolated hills, at from 4,000 to 8,000 yards' distance, commanding Ladysmith in every direction. Unless the whole perimeter of these hills could be held, they offered excellent positions to the enemy, as we know to our cost. The communication by rail was a long one, passing through a country intersected by rivers, broken by mountains, and much more adapted to the movements of mobile mounted Boers than to those of our troops. Forty-two miles to the northeast lay the coal fields of Dundee, with a short branch to the main line at Glencoe Junction. Their possession was of much value to Natal.

The Government of Natal was anxious that as small a portion as possible of the Colony should be overrun by the enemy, and supposing that, should the Boers invade, they would not dare to advance south with a strong British force left in their rear, it seemed most desirable that Ladysmith should be held in force, with a strong post at Dundee in front. These considerations seem to have finally determined the holding of Ladysmith as our main strategic position for the defense of Natal.*

When Sir G. White arrived, even had political considerations permitted his retiring his force to a better position more to the south, he was already committed to Ladysmith, for the Boer advance was developing rapidly and the difficulties of withdrawing the great stores of ammunition, provisions, etc., were quite insuperable. The Boers, who were on their borders on the 11th of October, advanced into Natal slowly at first, the Transvaalers from the north through Newcastle, and the Free Staters through the passes of the Drakenbergs on the west. Our advanced post at Glencoe, under General Symons, was considerably strengthened (to some 3,000 men in all), Sir G. White having about 9,000 at Ladysmith.

* The weakness of lengthy communications by a single line of railway does not seem to have been sufficiently considered.

On the 19th the enemy cut the communications between the two forces and established themselves at Elandslaagte Station, fifteen miles north of Ladysmith. General Joubert had arranged for a combined attack on Symons on the 20th, a commando of 4,000 men, under Lucas Meyer, coming from the eastward, to be met by one of 9,000 under Erasmus from the north. Meyer's commando took up position on the night of the 19th on Talana Hill, overlooking General Symons's position, and commenced the attack at daybreak. After a fierce combat, General Symons succeeded in driving the Boers headlong from their strong position just as Erasmus's commando was approaching, too late, apparently, to render any assistance—it retired, indeed, as soon as its advance guard came under fire of our artillery. Meyer's flying commando was pursued, but in the pursuit a portion of our cavalry and mounted troops were drawn on too far in the dark and were captured. General Symons had been mortally wounded in the afternoon. The loss on both sides was considerable; Meyer's commando was completely broken up.

Joubert's arrangements were excellent, though there is always a danger of such a combination as he had devised failing, as it did in this case. If Erasmus had carried out his instructions, it seems that nothing could have saved our small force from destruction or capture.

To re-establish communication, Sir G. White ordered an attack on the enemy at Elandslaagte on the 21st. This was most successfully carried out by General French, with about 4,000 men; the Boer position was stormed and a number of prisoners taken. But the situation of our force at Glencoe was so perilous that General Yule, who had assumed command, left his camp in the early morning of the 23d, and, marching by road, reached Ladysmith on the 26th. To cover Yule's retreat Sir G. White engaged the enemy, threatening his flank from the west, on the 24th, at Rietfontein, and achieved that object without coming to close quarters.

The Boers closed in on the north and east of Ladysmith, gradually increasing in numbers and establishing guns in position on the neighboring hills. On the 29th Sir G. White made a strong attempt to destroy new batteries that were being established to the north at Farquhar's Farm, with the view, also, if an action were brought on, of piercing the enemy's centre. The night before a small force, a mountain battery and two battalions, was sent some

miles westward to Nicholson's Nek to protect his left flank. Sir G. White did not succeed in his main engagement, the Boers retreating their right and centre and so strengthening their left as to enfilade his right flank, and he was forced to retire. The detachment at Nicholson's Nek was attacked in force and captured, the mules, with guns and rifle ammunition, having been stampeded during the night march.

On the 2d of November the Boers closed in on the west and south of Ladysmith, cutting the communications and completely investing it. Just before this was done reinforcements had arrived, among them, fortunately, a naval brigade with some heavy naval guns capable of coping with the Boer guns of position. The total force was then about 8,000 men, with supplies of food and ammunition sufficient for three months.

General Sir Redvers Buller, who had been selected as Commander-in-Chief of our Army, landed at the Cape on the 31st of October. Before he left England the strategical plan of campaign had been decided on, the main feature being, no doubt, an advance of his army corps into the Orange Free State, three separate columns starting from the several sea bases—Cape Town, Port Elizabeth and East London—using the railways running northward from those ports, and converging on the southern border (the Orange River) of the Free State, Sir G. White's field force in Natal, to the east, and the garrisons of Kimberley and Mafeking being left to take care of themselves for the time.

This seems sound strategy—to strike at the heart of the enemy's country, and to trust to the effect of the blow for the relief of our far-away flanks, already committed, by the enforced withdrawal of the enemy's commandoes attacking them. How far it would have succeeded must ever remain in doubt, for it was not carried out.

The supposed Boer plan of campaign is said to have been drawn up by a strategist of European reputation.

Offensive measures were to be adopted in Natal, and the Boers were to proceed by successive stages of enveloping (by cutting into its line of communication) the inferior British force, until they had driven it into the sea. In the Orange Free State they were to adopt a defensive policy based on the strategical advantage derived from its position on the flank of the railway north of De Aar Junction. It was assumed that—its bridges having been blown

up and the railway line beyond it to Bloemfontein destroyed—the obstacle of the Orange River would so retard a direct attack from the Dordrecht-Middeiburg base, that the invaders, to save time, would transfer their base to Kimberley for an advance on Bloemfontein, or further north still to Mafeking, to move against Pretoria.

In neither case were the Boers to oppose the movement in its earlier stages, but to operate on the long line of communications, De Aar to Kimberley (150 miles) and Kimberley to Mafeking (250 miles), as the case might be.

The forces presumed to be at their disposal were 27,000 Transvaal Boers and 20,000 Free Staters, a total of 47,000, of which number about 22,000 would be available in Natal. These numbers are no doubt approximately correct; but, unfortunately, we must add to them a large number, probably several thousand, of rebel sympathizers from parts of Cape Colony, and some even from Natal.

Whether the statement as to its origin is true or not, some such strategical plan the Boers have, with few exceptions, carried out, so far as applicable to our strategical moves, and up to this time with much success.

Between the date of Sir R. Buller's departure from England and his arrival at Cape Town the momentous events described had occurred in Natal; Mafeking and Kimberley had been invested, and, by the 2d of November, Sir G. White and his field force had been shut up in Ladysmith. The first phase of the war had ended with this event.

After spending some days in Cape Colony in visiting the three sea bases and the advanced posts which had been arranged for our strategic advance, and in learning exactly how matters stood there and in Natal, Sir R. Buller took a new departure and abandoned, at least for the time, the original plan of campaign. Whether he did this on his own initiative as Commander-in-Chief, looking to the new conditions existing and to difficulties in carrying out that plan, or from political pressure, or moved by instructions from higher authorities, we cannot yet tell.

The new plan adopted was to carry out the relief of our beleaguered garrisons at Ladysmith and Kimberley directly, by separate forces, instead of by the pressure of a single army of great strength entering the enemy's country. The line of ad-

vanced posts in Cape Colony already described was, however, still to be held and preparations continued at the several sea bases.

With the adoption of the new plan the second phase of the war was commenced. On the 9th of November the troops of the First Division of Buller's army corps began to move by sea from Cape Colony to Natal. Lieutenant-General Sir F. Clery was sent there, and shortly afterward Sir Redvers Buller himself arrived and took command. By the 22d of November our forces in Natal had been increased by about 15,000 men, principally of the First Division.*

A large force began also to assemble about the 10th of November on our extreme left strategic flank, under Lieutenant-General Lord Methuen, at Orange River Station, the most westerly of our advanced posts, for the relief of Kimberley, and by the 22d of November he had there a column of about 8,000 men.

Orders were given in England on the 9th of November for the mobilization of a fifth infantry division, apparently then meant to replace in Cape Colony the division diverted to Natal.

We will follow briefly the fortunes of the two separate campaigns, the theatres of which are some 300 miles apart. It may be remarked that both our armies consisted principally of infantry, both were singularly short of cavalry and artillery and so weak in transport as to be practically tied to their railway communications, which, in each case, consisted of a single line. In Natal the Boers, advancing south of Ladysmith and establishing a heavy battery north of Colenso (sixteen miles south of Ladysmith), drove out our garrison, which retired to Estcourt, seventeen miles southward, on the 7th of November. The Boers then occupied Frere, thirty-one miles south of Ladysmith, where the railway crosses the Blaauwkrantz River. Our garrison at Estcourt had been increased to about 2,000, with two naval guns and six field guns. But the Boers, continuing their advance, gradually enveloped it, and established themselves on the 19th at Highlands, on the railway line, twenty-three miles south of Estcourt, isolating it from Mooi River, our next post, thirty-one miles south. About the 20th the Boers were on the long line, Courton on the west to Weenen on the east, and rapidly advancing south, on both flanks of the railway, threatening to envelop Mooi River and then Pietermaritzburg, the capital of Natal, to which they approached within twen-

* Reasons of detail, as to where the several units were when the new plan was adopted, necessitated many changes in the Army Corps in its organization and distribution.

ty-five miles, looting the country as they advanced and enlisting rebel sympathizers.

On the 23d and 24th our advanced brigade, cut off at Estcourt, engaged the enemy in their rear, and cleared the way for our main body, which moved to Estcourt on the 29th, the advanced guard going on to Frere, thirty-two miles south of Ladysmith and seventeen miles from Colenso. There Buller began organizing his relief column, and by the 10th of December he had at his disposal in Natal some 22,000 regulars and probably 3,000 to 4,000 irregulars and colonial troops. Seeing our rapidly increasing strength and fearing for their communications, the Boers had hurriedly retired, carrying with them their loot, and concentrated to the north of the Tugela, where they now are, extending and strengthening the formidable positions there.

On the 14th of December Buller established a brigade in advance at Chieveley, five miles north of Frere, and on the 15th attacked the Boers, who held the north bank of the Tugela and also an entrenched position on our right flank upon its south side. His movement was apparently meant as a reconnaissance in force. As frequently happens, however, a portion of his troops, attempting the passage of the Tugela, committed him to a general action, in which our forces were repulsed, with much loss. Ten guns of our artillery supporting the fighting line and brought incautiously too near the Boers under cover were captured. The troops of the Fifth Division, under Sir C. Warren, commenced to reach Cape Town on the 16th, but, in view of this reverse, they were, excepting one or two infantry battalions, diverted to Natal, where they have all now arrived. More colonial irregulars have also been raised and Buller's forces in Natal must now amount to about 30,000 fighting men, with sixty to seventy guns, including those of the Naval Brigade. But in mounted troops and transport he is still sadly deficient. A cavalry regiment and two batteries of the Royal Horse Artillery (twelve guns), from India, should reach him within a few days' time, and also other reinforcements. If the position of things at Ladysmith will allow, he may well wait for these and form a strong flying column for a wide turning movement to coincide with his next attack.

At Ladysmith the enemy have attempted two assaults—on the 9th of November, when they were repulsed with much loss, and on the 6th of January, 1900, when, after a fierce struggle, during

which portions of our defenses were taken and retaken, the Boers were eventually repulsed, with severe loss, the fighting commencing about 2.30 in the morning and continuing until 7.30 in the evening. Sir Redvers Buller was, during part of the struggle, in communication by heliograph and made a demonstration in force against the enemy in his front, but found them too much on the alert to permit of an attack.* Small sorties have been made by our force, and recently two of the Boer heavy guns in position were taken and destroyed. The investment lines are not very close, nor has the continual bombardment inflicted severe loss. Provisions and ammunition exist for at least a month to come, and the garrison are much elated at their recent success.

Lord Methuen advanced from Orange River Station on the 22d of November with about 8,000 men. On the 23d he attacked the Boers in position at Belmont, twenty-one miles north, and drove them out with loss. Pushing on seven miles to Enslin, where the Boers had again entrenched themselves on broken hills, he was once more victorious. Advancing twenty-eight miles further to Modder River (twenty-five miles south of Kimberley), where the Boers were strongly entrenched, he fought on the 28th a fierce and prolonged battle for the passage of the river. This was so far indecisive that the troops remained on the field that evening, but during the night the Boers withdrew to a new position, about ten miles to the north, on a range of hills at Magersfontein. Lord Methuen's losses were heavy, but he had been previously reinforced and had still some 10,000 fighting men available after the battle. He remained at Modder River until the 9th of December to recruit his men (who had fought three actions in five days), to replenish supplies and to repair the railway bridge over the river. During this period he received considerable reinforcements, and his force, from Orange River northward, was brought up to about 12,000 men, with thirty or forty guns, a certain number being, however, taken up in the protection of his communications to Orange River. On the 9th a reconnaissance was made of the Boer position, and on the 10th it was severely bombarded. On the night of the 10th Methuen moved out his troops, who bivouacked near the Boer position, and in the dark the next morning attacked it.

The Highland Brigade, which was to have delivered the main

* The attack on Ladysmith was largely reinforced during the flight from the Boer force in front of Buller.

assault, was caught in close column by the enemy's fire, having got close to their trenches without being aware of it. They suffered terrible loss, and their surprise probably sealed the fate of the day. Though the attack was hotly pressed while daylight lasted and our troops slept on the field of battle, the enemy showed so bold a front the next morning that Lord Methuen retired to Modder River, where he still remains.

He has been further reinforced, and probably has with him some 10,000 fighting men, but he is exceedingly weak in cavalry (though his mounted troops have been increased by Australian and Canadian contingents), and the transport is still tied very much to the railway line. Though in communication, by searchlight, with Kimberley and only twenty-five miles from that town, he is unable at present to relieve it. His railway communications seem secure, but, unless able to become more mobile, his army must either remain inert, attack directly a position stronger than ever or retire along the railway line, which he cannot leave. A curious "*impasse*" for the present! The Boers also have been largely reinforced, and are supposed now to number 13,000; they are entrenching more and more on the flanks, which tend toward enveloping Methuen's position. Until our new plan of campaign was entered upon, the Free State Boers, expecting our attack on the Orange River side, contented themselves with destroying the bridges over the river, or preparing them for destruction, and also the railway line south of Bloemfontein; but, seeing our weakness, they became bolder and have encroached some fifty miles upon Cape Colony territory—apparently to the number of 6,000 to 8,000, including rebels joining them locally. About half the number oppose Gatacre, and the remainder are opposite French.

The advanced line of base, under the original plan, is held to the east by Lieutenant-General Gatacre, with about 3,000 men, about Sterkstroom. This officer attempted a surprise by night of the position of the Boers opposing him at Stormberg, but his force was attacked on the march, being itself surprised, suffered severely and lost three guns. The country he has to work in is a difficult one, and without a large increase, especially in mounted men, he cannot do more than hold his own.

Naauwpoort, more to the west, covering the Port Elizabeth line, is held by General French, with a small body of troops, well supplied with cavalry, horse artillery and mounted infantry, for

the movement of which arms the country in front is fairly adapted. By constantly threatening their communications, he is gradually driving back to the Orange River the commandoes opposed to him. If he completes his operations successfully, the remaining Boers south of the border will be awkwardly situated.

Kimberley is closely invested, but the proximity of Methuen's force probably relieves the pressure of the enemy.

Mafeking, after its long investment, is, it is feared, in bad straits. All that soldiers could do has been done by the garrison and its skillful commander, Colonel Baden-Powell.

As to our troops in the field and further provisions made for carrying on the war, Natal was reinforced in August. A day or two before Krüger's ultimatum was received (on the 10th of October) steps were taken to mobilize an army corps (52,000 men), but their embarkation only began on the 20th of October, nor was their landing in South Africa completed until December, the transports on the whole making slow passage. Offers of contingents from Canada and Australia of some 2,000 men were also accepted. On the 9th of November, when it was determined to change our plan of campaign, the Government decided to mobilize a fifth infantry division (say, 10,000 men); troops were also forwarded to replace those captured at Nicholson's Nek on the 30th of October, and authority was given to hasten on the recruiting and arming of irregular mounted corps in Natal and Cape Colony. Preliminary arrangements were ordered for the mobilization of a second army corps. The Fifth Division commenced to embark in November; the whole had reached Africa by the 30th of December and were diverted to Natal.

About the 4th of December, after Methuen had sustained serious losses, the mobilization of a sixth division (say, 10,000 men) was ordered. Its embarkation commenced about the 16th of December. Its troops are now beginning to arrive at Cape Town and they should all be landed there by the end of this month.

When the news was received of Sir Redvers Buller's serious reverse at the Tugela River, following closely upon Lord Methuen's repulse on the 11th and on the reverse experienced by General Gatacre in Cape Colony, public opinion was deeply stirred, and the Government took energetic steps, some of which constitute a complete and serious departure from our Organization for National Defense up to this time.

A new Commander-in-Chief, Lord Roberts, was appointed, (Sir Redvers Buller retaining command in Natal), with Lord Kitchener as Chief of Staff. A seventh infantry division (say, 10,000) was ordered to mobilize. The further contingents offered by Canada and Australasia (this time all mounted) were accepted. And it was decided, further, to form, from our yeomanry, an imperial force of horse of some 8,000 men, to send seven militia battalions volunteering for active service (about 5,000 men), and a large body of our volunteer force—300 mounted infantry, a battery of artillery (four guns) and about 6,000 infantry, all picked rifle-shots, volunteering for active service—so that a portion of our forces, never before used in actual war, will soon embark to take part in the campaign. This step will have results of a far-reaching nature in the future of our Empire and on the organization of our forces.

Including the seventh division, which commenced to embark on the 1st, about 33,000 men will be shipped by the 20th and reach South Africa before the end of February, when (exclusive of the garrisons now beleaguered) we should have about 120,000 men for the fighting line (including South African Colonists) under the British flag in the theatre of war. An eighth division is prepared for mobilization, a large number of batteries and artillery (about 100 guns, including guns of position), will be shortly sent on, and other measures taken.

To take the place of our regular troops in garrisons at home and abroad, where required, a sufficient number of militia battalions have been embodied. It will be seen how the military situation stands to-day and what efforts Great Britain has made, relying entirely upon her own subjects. Considering that men, horses and material have, for the most part, to be transported 4,600 miles and more by sea from the real base, our own shores or those of our Colonies,* the task is really a prodigious one. Should more strenuous efforts still be required, however, the shoulders of the British Empire will be found broad enough to bear their strain.

Having rapidly reviewed the sequence of events and the military situation of to-day, what conclusions are we to draw as to British and Boer strategy, tactics and troops, and how is the British ill-success so far to be accounted for? What will be the effects

* Curiously enough, Australia, Canada and England are approximately equidistant from the Cape of Good Hope.

of the war, when terminated, on the organization of the British military forces—now ruled at our War Office by a civil head, responsible, under the Government, for the national defense—and what will be the result upon the British Empire, from a military point of view?

The Boer strategy has been excellent, carrying out, on the whole, the plan of campaign described. Their advance into Natal, after the complete investment of Ladysmith, lacked dash and determination and little was gained by it. Fortunately for us, they also departed from their plan when Methuen advanced; had they carried it out, his column might have been dangerously compromised. Based, as their strategy has been, on their extreme mobility, as an army of horsemen, able easily to outflank us and to cut our communications—our want of mounted troops debars us from preventing them from doing so, or from threatening their communications—it has succeeded admirably. In military intelligence they have shown first-rate organization. They have been greatly aided by the sympathizers of their kin in our Colonies and by lavish expenditure in organizing it elsewhere.

Tactically, their mobility—and our want of it—has given them immense advantage. When driven from entrenched positions, they have been able to retreat with impunity and usually without pursuit. On the field of battle, as at Farquhar's Farm, they could rapidly retire one flank and reinforce the other and baffle our infantry on foot. In field entrenchments they have shown themselves masters, under skilled alien instruction. Intimately acquainted with the terrain, their leaders have shown much skill in choosing positions. Their ordinary mode of life makes them inimitable scouts. Excellent shots and furnished with long-range, rapid-firing rifles, of the most modern pattern (with smokeless powder), their rifle-fire is most formidable. Their guns, of the usual type employed in the field, are very good, outranging our own. They have taught us a lesson in the use of heavy guns of position, which they move with comparative rapidity in the field. Rapid-firing guns of small calibre, of most recent pattern, are largely used, often with terrible effect. Their artillery has been well handled, mostly by their mercenaries, but the ammunition used has been very defective.

In attack they are very cautious, always taking advantage of their mobility in the field to outflank us. Against entrenched

positions they are equally prudent, employing a long artillery preparation and making most skillful use of cover. Fighting, as individual citizens, they are very careful of their lives.* No bonds of discipline, as with regular troops, tend to make them face death almost carelessly. They are certainly better in defense than in attack, partly, no doubt, for that reason.

It is difficult to judge of our strategy (as to the plan of campaign) without knowing the exact reasons dictating departure from the original plan; but it seems to us, not knowing them, that it would have been better to have carried out the first plan at all costs, though one Army Corps would not have sufficed.

Otherwise, our strategy in the several theatres of war has been much dominated by that of the enemy, owing to their long start in time, and dreadfully hampered by our immense inferiority to them in mounted troops, by the distance to our bases and by our lack of transport, which compels our generals to advance along the railway lines to which they are of necessity glued, and has prevented them from threatening the enemy's lines of communication. General French, in the minor operations about Colesburg, having a mobile force, with many mounted troops, has been able to strike at the enemy's communications with excellent results. If our larger columns had had the same proportions as he has, their strategy would have been very different. As it is, they have been compelled to undertake frontal attacks whether they would or not, from want of mobility and of mounted troops.

Our Intelligence Department in South Africa has not been successful, and our commanders have been led on, at times, by false information and treacherous guides into dangerous positions, but their difficulties have been great from the number of Boer sympathizers in our Colonies; and the Kafirs, fearing more the summary treatment of the Boers than our milder methods, serve them better, and will continue to do so until they are certain that ours will be the winning side. Our tactics have been in many ways indifferent, but in them, as in our strategy, our paucity of mobile troops in the face of an enemy, for the most part mounted, must be considered, as must the nature of the country so eminently suited for defense.

Such mounted troops as we have, have been very well employed ;

* They would not concur in the truth of the lines:

"Theirs not to reason why;
Theirs but to do and die."

but, except the colonial contingents,* their scouting has been defective. Our field artillery has been admirably served, but our guns are outranged by those of the enemy. Our infantry rifles are inferior to those of the enemy in range, accuracy and rapidity of fire. Our infantry do not shoot as well as the enemy, though their shooting has been much improved of recent years, while the conditions of the clear air and peculiarities of color and form of country new to them have told against their shooting; their fire discipline has proved very good; when opportunity allowed of their using the bayonet, they have shown the *élan* and stubborn determination not to be denied, which have always distinguished the British soldier; they are not skillful in taking advantage of cover, but as they get more used to a country and conditions strange to them, they show, in that way, a rapid improvement. Taking them individually, as fighting men, they have proved splendid material, cool, brave and dashing when necessary; they have nobly sustained the best traditions of the British Army.

Our tactical formations, suitable for contending with ordinary troops, are, when approaching the present enemy, probably much too close. Direct attack, tactically, has been forced upon us in general by the same conditions, already explained, as have compelled us, strategically, to have recourse to it. Serious errors have been committed in the attack, in not taking the proper precautions as to scouting ahead and the use of advanced patrols, the cause of disasters at Stormberg, Magersfontein (to the Highlanders), and apparently also when we lost our guns at the Tugela.

It is evident that the new conditions introduced recently, and which we have first encountered here in war, of a long range, rapid-firing rifles and artillery, of much accuracy, using smokeless powder, and of heavy guns to back up in the field the lighter calibres, have revolutionized the relations of the defence to the attack, making the former so much more formidable that the ratio of numbers necessary may be roughly estimated as three for attack to one for defence.

The difference in mobility between our troops, mostly infantry, and the Boers, almost all mounted, was one for which our commanders in the field are not responsible; they had to do their

* Our Australian, New Zealand, Canadian and South African soldiers have shown themselves excellent material. Their mode of life and their horsemanship fit them admirably for this war, to which they are more adaptable than the English soldiers in many ways.

best with the material provided for them, but it has terribly handicapped their tactical work.

The Boers have proved themselves brave and formidable foes on the field of their own choosing, and their commanders most capable leaders. Tactically they have shown themselves superior to the ordinary British soldier, from the possession of the many advantages already mentioned, from their being accustomed to the climate and the country, fighting in their own land, with sympathizers to aid them in every direction. When deprived, however, to some extent, of these advantages, and fighting the British soldier on a more equal footing, man to man, the latter has proved himself the better of the two, whether in bold assault of almost impregnable positions, or in determined defence of weak ones; the British officer is, as always, brave almost to recklessness, active and energetic, but the conditions have been altogether so new to him, in many ways, that he is only now beginning to understand them fully and to meet them as they should be met. Our commanders have labored under the many disadvantages, strategical and tactical, already mentioned, and have also been often obliged to take action, against their better military judgment, for political reasons, local and otherwise. It is not possible at present to criticise them fairly.

So far, the Boers may pride themselves upon having had the best of the game. The British losses have certainly been greater than theirs; they hold as prisoners a large number of our officers and men; they have invaded our Colonies and forced us to fight them there, on ground of their own choosing, and they hold closely invested some 10,000 of our troops. Strategically and tactically, they have had the best of it, on the whole.

The causes are easy to perceive. For political reasons which the British Government considered sufficiently cogent, no steps, except reinforcing Natal on a small scale, had been taken by them for years past to increase our permanent garrisons in South Africa to meet a coming danger—nor when war was imminent, to make preparations for it on a large scale until so late in the day that the enemy (looking also to our distance from South Africa) had a clear start of some six weeks, which he made good use of.

When preparations on a large scale were begun, they were quite insufficient both as to the magnitude of the force to be sent and as to its nature; they included far too small a proportion of artil-

lery and mounted troops; the preparations were made but slowly and the greatness of the emergency was not understood. When at last this was forced on the Government and the nation it could only be met by quite abnormal steps; our army organization as such was not able to meet it.

There is no doubt, however wise one may be after the event, that we were all surprised, Government and nation, in many ways. It was not seriously expected, for instance, that the Orange Free State would act as it has done and join the Transvaal in an aggressive* war against us. The Boers were not credited with the powers of resistance they have shown. The marvellous increase in the power of the defense due to the immense improvement in arms—magazine rifles, long-range artillery, smokeless powder, etc.—was not duly appreciated, notwithstanding M. Bloch's predictions, most of which this war has amply justified; nor was it foreseen by us—perhaps not even by our present Continental critics—what it would be to contend against large forces consisting almost entirely of mounted troops, possessing from their very nature a wonderful mobility.

We have not, of recent years, been a military nation, and we have unfortunately rather prided ourselves upon the fact; and though individually of the best stuff for soldiers, and of combative and determined idiosyncrasy, we have preferred to utilize these qualities in pushing our commercial supremacy, and have troubled ourselves but indifferently as to national defense, save as represented by our Navy. Large expenditure upon the Army and its armament has always been begrudged. When in this instance the real strain came and our War Office organization failed, scapegoats are naturally sought for. But the nation itself is responsible. It has, through its representatives in Parliament, not only condoned but encouraged the neglect of many administrations to ensure sufficient expenditure on the Army and its armament. The same causes underlie the fact that our rifles and artillery are becoming obsolete, and that the Boers were ahead of us in having the latest arms out. For Great Britain to re-arm herself with either is a big business, meaning a very heavy expenditure, and we have always dallied long ere making the plunge, perhaps wisely so unless caught in such an emergency as this.

* For aggressive it certainly is. What better proofs of this than the annexations of British Territory coolly proclaimed by the President of either Republic.

We have experienced so rude a shock, and the weak points in our armor are so plain to us, that the nation, thoroughly awakened, will insist on a complete reorganization of our War Office, which has worked too long in ancient grooves, and of our Army, to meet new conditions.

It seems probable that we shall again become more of a military nation, as of yore, and that some system will be devised also, as in olden times, by which every able-bodied man will be obliged to take a personal share in the national defense.

Not only that, but even broader lines will be followed, and the military foundations of our Empire made doubly strong. Our great Colonies, who so loyally stand by us now, will rightly have a voice in the matter. A practical organization, including their forces for imperial defense, will grow out of it, and the British Empire will stand more secure than ever, through the sacrifices her sons have made and their blood shed for her greatness.

As to the war itself, it is taken for granted that British arms will win, probably after much further loss. But win we must, if but by the process of attrition.

Should Ladysmith be relieved—as now seems more probable—it will either be by the Boers raising the investment voluntarily to prevent worse things happening to them, or by Buller's succeeding in turning his adversary's flank with a mobile column, which he is no doubt organizing. In the latter case, the Boers may fare badly. If the town is relieved in either way, it is presumed that we shall leave a sufficient force to hold Ladysmith against any possible attack, strengthen our central force in Cape Colony by the remainder of our troops in Natal, and invade the Orange Free State, when the second act of the drama will commence. Should Ladysmith fall, we should probably hold the line of the Tugela in Natal, but otherwise proceed as above.

Three words spell the principal Boer advantages and our disadvantages, "Mounted Men" and the consequent "Mobility." We shall gradually become possessed of the same, and though we know that every preparation has been made for a prolonged and determined defense of the Republics, we shall show ourselves as stubborn and stiff-necked as our enemy and in time subdue them. It is not unlikely, however, that, when the Free State has been invaded, her people will no longer care to be dragged at the wheels of Krüger's chariot.

The British nation is firmly convinced that in this struggle it is fighting the battle of civilization, real freedom and individual liberty. Its enemy is a brave and in many ways a noble peasantry, misled by an ignorant and presumptuous Oligarchy who would keep civilization far from them, save where it meets their selfish ends, and who, much in the hands of alien intriguers, have crushed individual liberty as far as lay in their power. Firm in this conviction, we shall eventually win in the struggle—nor in the meantime allow any outside interference from great or small; and, as conquerors, we shall show the brave Boers that their individual liberty is as sacred to us as our own, but that their petty despots must disappear from the scene, and the peace of our Empire be disturbed no more from within.

JOHN F. OWEN.

London, Jan. 9, 1900.